

Good evening, my name is Brian Roccapiore and I am the VP of Special Program at Career Resources, Inc., the organization that operates the STRIVE programs in Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport. I personally oversee the operations of all three STRIVE sites, and I have come here tonight to ask this committee to reconsider eliminating the STRIVE Program from the budget. I have worked with STRIVE for over a decade and have seen firsthand the impact that this program has had on the lives of the people of Connecticut. Over the last twelve years STRIVE has successfully placed thousands into employment, and over the last five The Connecticut Department of Labor has invested \$1.3 million into STRIVE. For this investment, 305 graduates were placed into employment. Leveraging additional money, the programs were able to place over an additional 600 graduates into employment.

While the STRIVE program is open to any resident of the State who has an honest desire to go to work, the program traditionally serves the hardest to serve populations. More than half are former offenders, 41% were single parents, 80% were receiving some form of public assistance while 20% did not have a H.S. diploma. Despite the prolonged downturn in the economy and working with a multi-barriered population, the program still maintains an impressive placement rate of over 65% state wide

I know that there are tough decisions that need to be made, and that funds are tight. I ask that when this committee makes their decisions that they please consider the results that STRIVE shows compared to other employment and training programs, while operating at a fraction of the cost. We are facing the elimination of over \$270,000 of funds for the three STRIVE, which would have devastating effects on our ability to continue the operations of the program and continue the same level of service which we have built a reputation for.

Instead of flooding this chamber with program graduates telling their stories, yesterday I submitted dozens of support letters from program graduates, partner organizations, employers who work with our graduates, and foundations who fund the program. Today with me, I have Tirzah Kemp, a

Hello,

My name is Tirzah Kemp and eight years ago I graduated the STRIVE-New Haven Program. I have come here tonight to ask this committee to reconsider eliminating the STRIVE Program from the budget. Eight years ago I was at a crossroads in my life. I was a new mother, unemployed, and collecting state benefit assistance. If it was not for the STRIVE program teaching me job search techniques for today's unemployed population, but teaching me life skills to go along with the tools given I would not be where I am today. At that time I was a single parent earning \$8.50 per hour to now earning salary and able to have my own medical insurance and afford to raise my two sons.

STRIVE teaches life skills such as, how to ask for help when you really need it, ensuring participants have a support system in place when "life happens", and to reinforce everything learned while in the program on a continuous basis long after graduating the program. While on State Assistance through the jobs first program, I received workforce training from every job training program in New Haven. Programs that are State and Federally funded could not help me the way STRIVE has. It was STRIVE that clicked for me. I not only graduated the STRIVE program but I was employed with STRIVE for 5 years where I started out as an Outreach Specialist and ended as the Graduate Services manager and Classroom facilitator. I was a single parent of two boys with a felony conviction on my record. I now have received a full pardon and continue to work within my community serving others.

What makes STRIVE different from other job training programs? STRIVE is an intense 3 week, Monday through Friday workforce program assisting individuals who are underemployed, unemployed, and for those considered unemployable. The intensity of the program is what makes it work. There are no free passes in the STRIVE program and that's why STRIVE graduates are successful. STRIVE not only focuses on the job search assistance but also teaches life skills. How NOT to end up back in the STRIVE seats. There are tons of Workforce programs in the Greater New Haven area. STRIVE is unlike any other program. STRIVE continues to play a huge role in my personal growth and never forgetting the seeds STRIVE planted in my head. I have personally watched over 1,000 graduates start the program with no hope in life to graduating with a new lease on life (including myself)! The graduates of the STRIVE program are able to receive transportation to get to and from the program, receive clothing to assist with interviews, receive on-going resume/job search support and unlike most programs, STRIVE offers two years of continued follow up to ensure STRIVE supports their graduates of the program. STRIVE supports their participants and graduates without selling them dreams but by being very honest with their participants while addressing attitudes and behaviors that prevent individuals from being successful. STRIVE has changed my life in more ways than I can ever document on paper. STRIVE is the only intense program in the state that offers the consistency of a work-simulated environment, along with offering life skills training for the whole person and offers family support.

Individuals, regardless of race, color or creed need help and support. Too many programs sell dreams to ensure they are funded the next year. Not STRIVE, the work comes from the heart. Without STRIVE Workforce Training, individuals may not be receiving the support they need to get back to work but instead attending just another "program" that doesn't truly help the person as a whole.

Thank you